



"Psychology Works" Fact Sheet: Student Wellness and COVID-19

As the COVID-19 situation evolves around the globe, students' lives are being disrupted, and they are being forced to master new learning methods, while managing uncertainty, stress and a host of complex emotions. From courses being moved from an in-person setting to online classes, to not being able to visit friends and family, to not having physical access to on-campus resources (such as mental health clinics), to having to leave residence, and conferences being cancelled, students' lives are being affected in many ways.

The Canadian Federation of Students has partnered with the Canadian Psychological Association to bring you resources in this unprecedented time of stress to help students cope psychologically in the face of health risks like COVID-19. As you deal with the impacts of COVID-19 on your life and the implications for your loved ones and the world at large, it is important to prioritize your mental health, as well as your physical well-being.

Visit the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) website at <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html> for important and up to date information about COVID-19, including how the virus is contracted, its signs and symptoms, how to decrease your risk of contracting the virus, and how the virus is treated.

Mental Health Risks Associated with COVID-19

It is important to remember that it is normal to be emotionally affected by events like wide-spread illnesses and that everyone will react differently to current world events. It is also important to remember that although these events may feel overwhelming, we are strong and resilient and have access to tools which can help us cope with stressors. Signs of stress can look like:

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

If you are experiencing any of these, remember to be patient with yourself as you are navigating a rapidly evolving situation and coping with many stressors and major changes.

Coping with Stress and Anxiety

During this time, it is really important to take care of yourself and pay attention to your mental well-being. Here are some tips to manage stress and anxiety:





- **Follow health and safety guidelines:** Check credible sources such as the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada to reduce the risk of contracting the virus. Remember that the media reports things that go wrong more often than things that go right. We hear about and pay more attention to the few people who might have been made very sick or who have died from an illness than we do about the many more people who have successfully recovered from an illness.
- **Take breaks from the news:** While it's important to stay informed and take guidance from health experts, hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting. Make sure to take breaks from the news, including social media. If you want to stay informed but are becoming overwhelmed, set aside a set amount of time to check the news every day or sign up for a daily newsletter from a reputable news source.
- **Take care of your body:** Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and do not increase your consumption of alcohol and drugs. YouTube can be a great place to find at-home workouts, guided meditations, or tips and tricks on cooking nutritious meals.
- **Take care of your mind:** To cope with times of uncertainty, it can be easy to dive into a series, watch movies endlessly or jump on board with other mindless distractions for long periods of time. While this does help us escape current realities, it can feel unproductive and potentially unhealthy to disengage for too long. Consider, instead, choosing distraction activities that keep your mind thoughtful and stimulated. Is there a list of books you would like to read? Are there some podcasts that were suggested by like-minded friends? Consider listening to audiobooks while completing chores or other projects to keep yourself active throughout the day. Try to consciously choose the information you take in, such as historical or biographical reads, and watch out for those distractions that are engaged in out of convenience.
- **Connect with others:** Your community is there for you in times of physical distancing. Connect with your loved ones and people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling. Apps like Skype, FaceTime and Whatsapp allow you to call your friends and family through an internet connection so you don't have to use your phone plan minutes.
- **Ask for help:** Call a health care provider such as a psychologist, social worker, counsellor, family physician, or psychiatrist, if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.

International Students can have a harder time connecting with family abroad due to possible unstable internet communication. Here are other ways to stay connected with your community:

- **Reach out to a classmate:** Chatting with peers can open doors to deeper connections and friendships. At this moment, a lot of people understand the need for connection and are open to making new friends!
- **Join an online group for international students:** You are not alone. There are many international students in Canada going through similar experiences and coming together. Check out these Facebook groups: International Student Network and Migrant Students United!





Studying from Home

You might be used to going to the library or getting together with friends at a coffee shop to study, and the line between classes and everyday life can become more and more blurred as you are respecting physical distancing measures. During these quickly changing times, it is important to both have realistic expectations and adjust them regularly to align with the current reality. Here are some tips to help you do that and get set up for continuing your studies from home:

Your study environment

- **Dedicated study or workspace:** If possible, set up a dedicated workspace where you can keep study materials and have virtual classes or group chats, so that you keep your studies separate from the rest of your life. Try to remember proper ergonomics when setting up your workspace.
- **Having resources at your disposal:** Take some time to make sure you have everything you need at your disposal to effectively conduct your studies, as this could help mitigate potential stressors. For example, install any required software on your computer or order a headset and webcam for online classes. Reach out to your professor or students' union if you need support and resources.
- **Comfort and quiet:** As much as possible, keep your study space quiet and free from distractions. If you have roommates, you could use headphones (ideally noise-cancelling headphones) to drown out noise. Make sure your space is inviting so you want to spend time there (you could sit by a window or add a plant or favourite trinket to your desk).

Setting a schedule for school and life

- **Maintain a consistent routine:** This includes sleep-wake times, exercise, and work/school schedules. It can be easy to do schoolwork all day because it feels like there is nothing else to do. Establishing and maintaining a routine will help you maintain a sense of normalcy and keep your schoolwork and home life separate.
- **Take breaks:** It's important to take breaks to rest your eyes, your mind and your body. If it's hard for you to remember to take breaks, you could set up a timer for 90 minutes and then take a 15-minute break.
- **Check in with professors about expectations:** Maintain good communication with your professors. Have a clear understanding from your professor about whether moving to online classes changes expectations around assignments, exams, and other academic requirements. For example, you could ask for flexibility on timelines given your current time zone.





Impacts on Graduate Students and Student Research

For some students, COVID-19 has had significant impacts on your research. Graduate students have been particularly impacted during this crisis. The combination of financial uncertainty, pressure to graduate within a given time frame and before funding runs out, managing your research and teaching responsibilities, disruption in their academic work, and lost conference presentation opportunities underscores the importance of prioritizing your mental health and well-being. Remember to have realistic expectations for your work and progress during a global pandemic. It is okay if you feel that you do not have the mental or emotional capacity to produce knowledge or undertake research during a global crisis. Here are other tips for coping as a student researcher:

- Create a daily routine and set realistic goals for yourself.
- Reach out to your department for support and stay in touch with your supervisors and have conversations about how you plan on carrying on with your work during this new reality.
- If you had been accepted to submit at a conference and the conference was cancelled, contact the conference organizers regarding their policy about noting the conference acceptance on your CV, and obtaining the word on how to do so.
- Talk to your university's research officer to understand what, if any, impacts COVID-19 will have on any student funding you may have (e.g., scholarships, bursaries, fellowships).
- See if your research can be conducted through online surveys or if your research protocol can be moved to an online experiment.
- If possible, use this time to talk to your professors about working on publications, while not losing sight of the mental resources required to cope with COVID-19.

Keep Busy and Beat Boredom

Self-isolation and physical distancing have drastically changed the way we conduct our daily lives. Boredom is a common response as we adjust to staying home to help flatten the curve. Keep busy in order to stave off boredom and potential impacts on your psychological response to COVID-19. Here are some ideas:

- **Stay connected:** There are different online platforms for games/entertainment to help you stay connected with your loved ones. Some popular applications are SnapChat, TikTok, Houseparty, Zoom, and Jackbox.
- **Jump on a viral challenge:** There are countless challenges on social media that encourage people to try something different and share it with the online community. Try "draw something", "until tomorrow" or "see a dog, send a dog". For more ideas, check out this news [article](#).





- **Discover a new hobby:** You could use the extra spare time to try new activities such as [zines](#), journaling, visiting museums virtually, karaoke, virtual escape rooms, and [more!](#) Additionally, consider checking out popular online courses as many websites are currently offering free lessons for the foreseeable future. If you have been interested in trying your hand at a new creative pastime, online courses can give structure and provide advice to help with that learning curve. Try engaging creatively in projects such as drawing, sewing or playing a new instrument.
- **Organize!:** COVID-19 has shown the scale in which we need governments to fund public services such as healthcare and education. This pandemic can also be a window of opportunity to re-envision a just society. Liaise with activist organizations such as the [Canadian Federation of Students](#), [Fight for 15 & Fairness](#), [Migrant Workers Alliance for Change](#), [Climate Strike Canada](#), [Our Time](#) and other groups to get involved.

When Psychological Distress Becomes Too Much

It is normal to be emotionally affected by events like wide-spread illnesses and that everyone will react differently to current world events. However, if any of the following signs and symptoms persist beyond a couple of weeks, persist to the point where you are not able to carry out the home or work-related activities permitted by physical distancing advisories, and are accompanied by intense feelings of despair or helplessness or suicidal thoughts you are well advised to consult a regulated health care professional such as a psychologist, your family physician, a nurse practitioner, psychiatrist, or other mental health provider.

- Sleeping poorly, too much or too little
- Avoiding others, even within the confines of social distancing
- Experiencing headaches and stomach problems
- Crying
- Talking less
- Feeling anxious, depressed or having panic attacks
- Feeling angry, guilty, helpless, numb, or confused
- Thinking about or watching too much television on COVID-19 or pandemics
- Not wanting to get out of bed
- Having difficulties concentrating
- Excessive eating
- Drinking more alcohol or taking more prescription drugs
- Having little patience





- Feeling overprotective of loved ones

Where do I go for more information?

To obtain important and up to date information about COVID-19, visit the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) website at <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

Provincial, territorial, and some municipal associations of psychology often maintain referral services. For the names and coordinates of provincial and territorial associations of psychology, please visit: <https://cpa.ca/public/whatisapsychologist/PTassociations>

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Your opinion matters! Please contact us with any questions or comments about any of the *Psychology Works* Fact Sheets: factsheets@cpa.ca

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